

## Freedom vs. Security: Striking the Right Balance

By Ernest Istook

The attack on September 11<sup>th</sup> brings a new set of challenges to the travel industry as well as to the rest of American life. We must confront the reality of international and domestic terrorism. We must live with new threats, new levels of security, and new inconveniences. As we embark on this journey together, the travel industry especially cannot ignore the changing landscape of America's future.

Protecting America and Americans is and will remain our highest national priority. However, we also want to be certain that in our haste to make our citizens secure we do not burden businesses with overzealous security measures or unnecessarily impede individual liberty or free flow of trade.

Americans love their freedom. We want to be free to say what we like, do what we like, and travel where we like. We like to hop in our cars, on a bus, on a train, or even in a plane without showing papers, submitting to full-luggage search, or asking some bureaucrat's permission.

But we also want to know that we're protected. I'd argue that today Americans are a little less worried about a camera invading their privacy in public places, and a little more concerned about proactive measures taken to assure their safety when traveling.

As the chairman of the appropriations subcommittee which oversees funding for the White House, the Secret Service, the Office of Homeland Security, the U.S. Customs Service, and numerous other government agencies, I have been involved firsthand in the efforts to balance our desires for ease of travel and free flow of trade with our concerns for national security and effectively fighting the war on terrorism.

There has been no shortage of remedies offered. The administration has proposed reorganizing federal agencies and creating a Department of Homeland Defense. Congress passed legislation to federalize airport baggage screeners. Bills have been introduced to offer tax incentives and federal grants for private businesses to enhance security in their own industries (including H.R. 3429, the Over-the-Road Bus Security and Safety Act, which would authorize \$200 million in reimbursement to bus operations for security improvements made since September 11<sup>th</sup>). There has been talk of arming pilots and installing marshals on buses and airplanes. Opposing sides have argued the benefits and dangers of combining agencies like the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), and the U.S. Customs Service. Even removing the Coast Guard from the Department of Defense and placing it under the new Department of Homeland Security has been debated.

Some of these are good ideas; some might have unforeseen and, quite possibly, dangerous consequences. But whatever path we choose, we must keep foremost in our minds the goal of striking that delicate balance, of preserving the freedom of American

citizens as much as possible while still maintaining their safety and keeping the wheels of business and industry turning.

The U.S. Customs Service provides an excellent example of this balance playing out in the real world. The Customs Service oversees the importation of \$1.7 billion worth of goods over the border every year, collecting appropriate fees and confiscating contraband items with minimum inconvenience for legitimate businesses.

One of the key ways this is accomplished is through increased communication and advanced technology. In the past two years, Congress has accelerated the funding for the Automated Customs Exchange (ACE) system so that it will be up and running in four years rather than ten. The ACE system will replace the current antiquated technology with a system that will allow Customs to both facilitate legitimate trade and better detect potential dangers by helping officials to identify high-risk shipments and better distribute their workforce.

We need to be concerned with national security, but misdirected, expensive, burdensome security measures don't help anyone. They merely discourage travel, limit individual freedom, and depress business and trade. And they certainly don't prevent terrorism.

One of the best ways to prevent oppressive, misdirected regulation by Congress is for private industries to take the initiative and responsibility to increase the safety of their customers and employees on their own.

We need to be careful about the legislation passed by Congress in the coming months. We need to look to examples set by successful agencies, like the Customs Service. We need to learn from mistakes of others, like the INS. Just shuffling agencies and adding more security procedures will not win the war on terrorism. Everyone working together, exercising more caution, increasing communication, and focusing efforts might.

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